'THE RINGWOOD FIELD NATURALIST' CLUB NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 34 April, 2012

EDITORIAL: According to the Middle Yarra Timelines, April is the time when Late Summer gives way to Early Winter. It is a season of great variety and activity. Showers of rain wash away the dust and accentuate the perfumes of the bush. Frog calls echo from the recharged wetlands. Autumn orchid species come into flower. The emblematic pink heath (*Epacris impressa*) provides a cheerful contrast to mists and grey skies. Wedge-tailed Eagles may be seen patrolling their territories. Insect species proliferate, providing food for other creatures before the days shorten and temperatures drop. Fungi begin to appear, their strange fruiting bodies erupting from the leaf litter and dead wood of the understorey. And members of the Ringwood Field Naturalists Club take the opportunity to spend a weekend away together to enjoy the delights of the season.

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Members about to set off from Little Desert Lodge for a day exploring the natural history of the area, October 2011

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PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

50th Anniversary Spring Camp, Little Desert National Park
14th–16th October 2011 Leaders: Peter and Alison Rogers

Over the weekend 14/15/16 October, the Club held their spring 'camp-out' at the Little Desert Lodge. Over the weekend there were 29 members and 4 visitors in attendance. Members either used the Lodge accommodation or camped in the Lodge campground. Many arrived early on the Friday afternoon and spent their time looking around the area, before coming together for a BBQ tea.

The itinerary for Saturday commenced with a leisurely visit to Stringybark Walk on the Nhill-Gymbowen Rd in the Little Desert National Park. The bush was alive with spring flowers including swathes of Fringe myrtle *Calytrix tetragona*, Golden Pennants *Glischrocaryon behrii*, and various egg and bacon plants *Pultenaeas* and *Dillwynias*. Birds were also plentiful with Buff-rumped thornbills and Red-capped robins a delight. Most members also sighted a female Southern Whistling Moth.

After a quick morning tea we moved further down the Nhill-Gymbowen Rd. A quick stop on the side of the road, we dodged a sharp shower of rain but were fortunate to find *Boronias*, *Caladenias* and *Euphrasia collina*. Lunch was held just off the road. Before we moved on for the afternoon we found a large patch of Blue Tinsel Lily *Calectasia intermedia*.

Another roadside stop further along the Nhill-Gymbowen Rd enabled members to photograph a five flower headed Grasstree *Xanthorrhoea australis* as well as our first encounter with an unusual plant, the Wheel-fruit *Gyrostemon australasicus*.

Our next stop was at the Park boundary where walked along the track heading over a couple of sandhills that had been recently burnt. A variety of pea flowers and Blue-spike Milkwort *Comesperma calymega* were abundant and in full flower. A highlight here was Small Rustyhood *Pterostylis pusillus* as well as Purple Beard-orchid *Calochilus robertsonii*.

Afternoon tea was spent by a small dam with the immediate surrounds covered in Bristly Bush-pea *Pultenaea acerosa*. We were also visited by a Brown falcon.

Our final stop for the day was one of the gravel pits and again we were fortunate to locate a couple of special orchids, Flat Rustyhood *Pterostylis planulata* and Upright Spider-orchid *Caladenia stricta*.

50th Anniversary Spring Camp, Little Desert National Park (cont)

Birds of interest for the day included Hooded robin, Tawny crowned honeyeater, Chestnut rumped thornbill and Rufous songlark.

Our day concluded with an evening meal in the Lodge. After the meal we were given a special presentation by Maree and Graham Goods who spoke on travelling through the Great Victoria Desert.

Before heading off for the Sunday activities, the members gathered for a group photo. Our first stop for the day was the Nhill Lake. For the first time in many a long year, the lake was full and teeming with waterbird life. Members took plenty of time walking around the lake and over the extensive boardwalks. A highlight here was the numerous small flocks of Black-tailed Native-hens.

After a quick morning tea, we headed for Salt Lake Rd in Kiata. A couple of stops along this road yielded more Wheel-fruit *Gyrostemon australasicus*, Blue-spike Milkwort *Comesperma calymega*, carpets of Heath-myrtle *Micromyrtus ciliata*, Scarlet Mint-bush *Prostanthera aspalathoides* in various shades of red and a few bushes of Bush-pea *Pultenaea laxiflora*. Lunch was held in the Kiata Camp Ground where members again enjoyed the chance to swap stories.

Our final destination was the Kiata Sanctuary Picnic Ground. Members walked the Keith Hateley Nature Walk with highlights on this walk including a huge bush of Grooved Dampiera *Dampiera lanceolata* and a working Malleefowl mound (alas no actual Malleefowl). Members finished with afternoon tea before we headed to The Union Hotel in Nhill for an evening meal.

Monday morning and most members packed up and returned to Melbourne. A few decided to stay an extra couple of days and a few moved to other pastures. In all, a great weekend was had by everyone.

Field Trip to Marysville and Cathedral Range State Park - 12th November 2011

- by Leaders Alan and Hazel Veevers

In perfect weather conditions, 31 members gathered by the new Memorial Gardens in Marysville. Evidently much thought and creativity had gone into the design of the garden, providing a peaceful place for reflection on the tragic fire of 2009. Using the new footbridge over the Steavenson River, we took the extended Fern Gully Track where new indigenous shrubs together with regrowth of survivors provoked much botanical discussion amongst the group. This scene contrasted with the view of once majestic gum trees, which were now blackened stumps. Along the track, a variety of birds, butterflies and moths were observed and photographed, including a White-necked Heron flying over a host of Australian Wood Ducks on a nearby pond.

Returning to the cars we went in convoy to the Cathedral Range State Park, entering by the somewhat challenging Cerberus Road, which was littered with wind-blown branches, many having to be cleared by hand. We had lunch in the Sugarloaf car park, where the fact that 92% of the Park had been burnt in the 2009 fires was evidenced by the sight of thousands of charred tree remains, through which could be seen wonderful rock formations that had been hidden from view for decades. An Alpine Copperhead snake slithered through as lunch was finishing, giving good photo opportunities for some whilst others climbed onto a table top! Short walks in the area produced some lovely spring flowers, including Native Violets and Twining Glycine. The sharp-eyed bird-watchers reported Flame, Rose and Scarlet Robins.

The convoy moved on to Jawbones car park, passing more beautiful spring flowers and rock formations on the way. Several orchid species seen here were Black Tongue Caladenia, Hooded Caladenia, Common Bird Orchid, Hyacinth Orchid (leaves), Sun Orchid sp. (leaves). A Fan-tailed Cuckoo, easily seen, called continuously throughout our short stay.

The next stop was Cook's Mill Picnic Ground where a short walk revealed, notably, a pair of Satin Bowerbirds and also a lone Koala pacing along the ground.

Ned's Gully was our final destination and it was good to see an area that had escaped the fires. Nest-building Striated Pardalotes and a pair of Varied Sword-grass Brown butterflies provided a final flourish for the many keen photographers present. It was agreed that this had been a most enjoyable excursion and that, despite the fire damage, it remains an area rich in many aspects of natural history.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS (CONT)

Field Trip to Macedon Regional Park - 15th January 2012

- by Leaders Alan and Hazel Veevers

After meeting at Centennial Park at the base of the mountain, the group travelled in convoy to Sanatorium Lake near the summit. Here the thirty members spent the morning on a circuit walk of the lake and traversed a nearby fern gully. There was much of interest to see, including a pair of Blue-winged Parrots, Rufous Fantail, many temperate rain-forest plants, tall Messmate (*Eucalyptus obliqua*) and Mountain Ash (*E. regnans*) forest, common Bird Orchids and ferns in the moist gullies. Vegetation was generally lush, no doubt due to the elevation and the above average rainfall in the past year. An early highlight was an obliging Dusky Antechinus, which spent several minutes scampering to and fro along a fallen log, allowing good views for all.

After lunch, the convoy continued to the summit car park where the first activity was a short walk to the Western Lookout. Magnificent views over the distant countryside were enjoyed, whilst, for those who ventured a little way off the track, the flowers of an alpine meadow coloured the scene with hues of blue, yellow and red.

Walking next towards the Memorial Cross, the dominant tree was Snow Gum (*E. pauciflora*). Photographers in the group were occupied with Cinnamon Bells orchids, dragonflies, butterflies and a large water skink basking on the steps of the Memorial. Blue-winged Parrots and White-eared Honeyeaters were nearby. As we walked back to the cars, a male Flame Robin was delighting onlookers by feeding a demanding juvenile. It was a fitting end for an enjoyable excursion to a new area for many of the group.

As an optional extra, half the participants chose to climb Camel's Hump, where fine views were enjoyed as well as more beautiful flowers and butterflies, before heading for home.

Field Trip to Cranbourne Botanical Gardens - 11th February 2012

- by Leaders Alan and Hazel Veevers

Despite a poor weather forecast, twenty-three members met at Stringybark Car Park for the morning walk to Wylie's Wetlands. The understorey vegetation was healthy and dense in the bush areas, being regrowth after the prescribed burn of 2005. Dusky Woodswallows were circling overhead, the first of many such sightings throughout the walk.

Several Swamp Wallabies were encountered in the bush and grasslands, over which a Wedge-tailed Eagle flew as we approached the first pond. Despite the abundance of water, Australasian Grebe and Purple Swamp Hen were the only water-birds there.

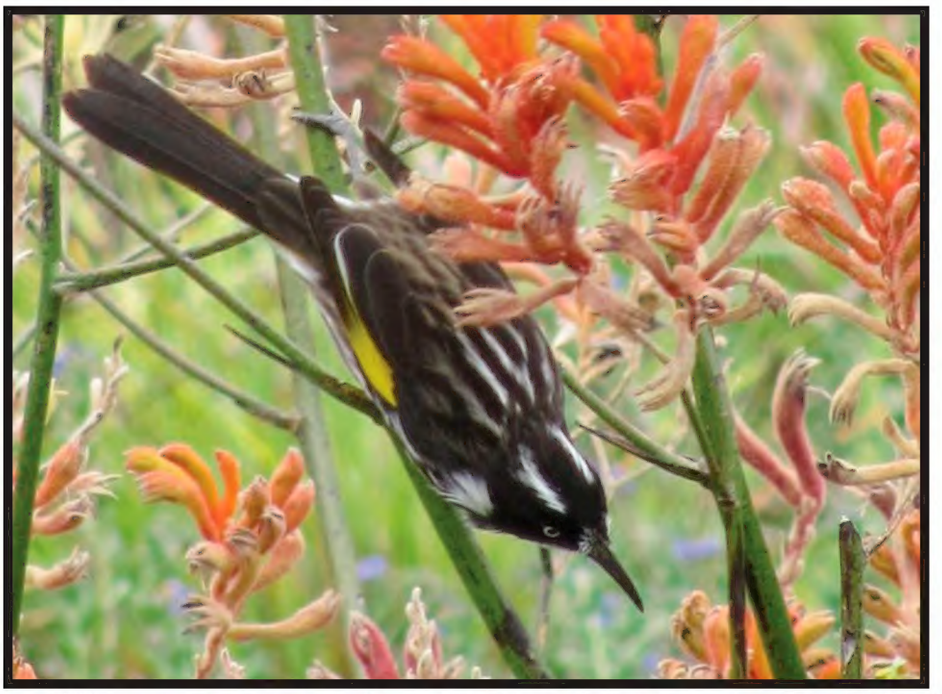
Rain began to fall as we regained the main track and headed for the other ponds. An Eastern Great Egret and several White-faced Herons flew slowly away, leaving Hoary-headed Grebe and a Little Black Cormorant behind. The Eagle returned with its mate as we rounded the last pond.

Arriving at the Perched Swamp, we were disappointed to find it dry after so much recent rain. Lunch was had in the picnic area in dry conditions. The anticipated sighting of Southern Brown Bandicoots did not occur.

We drove to the Australian Garden to see how the extension was progressing and to enjoy the parts remaining open. The steady rain did not deter the photographers from capturing images of New Holland Honeyeaters, Superb Fairy-wrens and some impressive floral specimens. To everyone's delight, a young Southern Brown Bandicoot could be seen foraging amongst stony mulch.

The hardy, and already drenched, amongst us set off on the climb to the Trig Lookout, and were immediately rewarded with another Bandicoot, this time digging holes in the sand as it foraged for insects. Despite the weather the 360-degree view from the top was still impressive.

An Echidna crossing the road was the final sight as we headed home.



New Holland Honeyeater, Australian Garden, Cranbourne – photo Judith Cooke

Field Trip to Yellingbo – 17th March 2012 - Leader Jackson Airey

Twenty-two members enjoyed a morning walk at the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. We were given permission to access the reserve along Woori Yallock creek. This is a very special reserve as it preserves habitat for the endangered Helmeted Honeyeater – the Victorian bird emblem – and contains the largest remaining colony of these birds. The reserve is managed by the DSE and the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater group. The wild population is monitored regularly and is bolstered by released birds from the Healesville captive breeding programme.

A light mist greeted us when we arrived at the Yellingbo "depot" but this cleared as we headed out on the walk. The group quickly strung out along the vehicle track so bird sightings depended on where in the group you were. Highlights were a Collared Sparrowhawk being mobbed by Magpies and a Crested Shrike-tit.

After the walk we had lunch around the depot and then members departed to make their own way home or on to another site for the afternoon.

NATURE NOTES

Field Trip to Marysville and Cathedral Range State Park - 12th November 2011 - Bird List

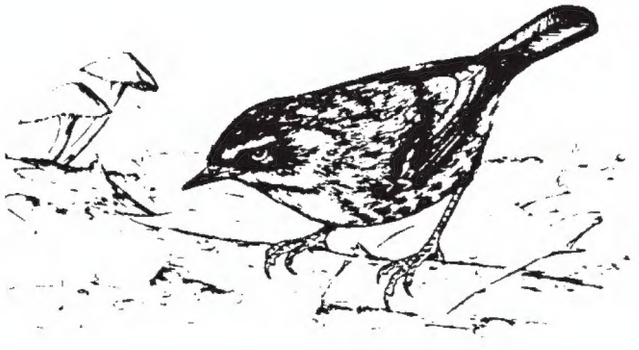
Australian Wood Duck	Brown Thornbill
Common Bronzewing	Spotted Pardalote
White-necked Heron	Striated Pardalote
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Little Eagle	Red Wattlebird
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	White-naped Honeyeater
Gang-gang Cockatoo	Eastern Whipbird
Little Corella	Golden Whistler
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Rufous Whistler
Australian King-Parrot	Grey Shrike-thrush
Crimson Rosella	Olive-backed Oriole
Eastern Rosella	Pied Currawong
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	Grey Fantail
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Little Raven
Laughing Kookaburra	Scarlet Robin
Sacred Kingfisher	Flame Robin
White-throated Treecreeper	Rose Robin
Satin Bowerbird	Eastern Yellow Robin
Superb Fairy-wren	Silvereye
White-browed Scrubwren	Common Blackbird [I]
Striated Thornbill	Common Myna [I]

Field Trip to Macedon Regional Park - 15th January 2012 - Bird List

Little Pied Cormorant	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Golden Whistler
Crimson Rosella	Rufous Whistler
Blue-winged Parrot	Grey Shrike-thrush
Laughing Kookaburra	Australian Magpie
White-throated Treecreeper	Pied Currawong
Superb Fairy-wren	Grey Currawong
White-browed Scrubwren	Rufous Fantail
Brown Thornbill	Grey Fantail
Spotted Pardalote	Willie Wagtail
Eastern Spinebill	Little Raven
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Flame Robin
White-eared Honeyeater	Eastern Yellow Robin
Crescent Honeyeater	Silvereye
Brown-headed Honeyeater	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
White-naped Honeyeater	31 species

Field Trip to Cranbourne Botanical Gardens - 11th February 2012 - Bird List

Australian Wood Duck	Spotted Pardalote
Grey Teal	Striated Pardalote
Pacific Black Duck	White-eared Honeyeater
Australasian Grebe	White-plumed Honeyeater
Hoary-headed Grebe	Bell Miner
Spotted Dove [I]	Red Wattlebird
Common Bronzewing	New Holland Honeyeater
Little Black Cormorant	White-naped Honeyeater
Australian Pelican	Golden Whistler
Eastern Great Egret	Rufous Whistler
White-faced Heron	Grey Shrike-thrush
Australian White Ibis	Dusky Woodswallow
Brown Goshawk	Grey Butcherbird
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Australian Magpie
Purple Swamphen	Grey Fantail
Eurasian Coot	Willie Wagtail
Pacific Gull	Little Raven
Rainbow Lorikeet	Magpie-lark
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	Eastern Yellow Robin
Laughing Kookaburra	Silvereye
Superb Fairy-wren	Welcome Swallow
White-browed Scrubwren	Common Myna [I]
Striated Thornbill	Red-browed Finch
Brown Thornbill	47 species



Field Trip to Yellingbo – 17th March 2012 – Bird List

Australian Wood Duck	White-browed Scrubwren
Great Cormorant	Brown Thornbill
Little Pied Cormorant	Dusky Woodswallow
Collared Sparrowhawk	Grey Butcherbird
Masked Lapwing	Australian Magpie
Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo	Crested Shrike-tit
Crimson Rosella	Golden Whistler
Eastern Rosella	Grey Shrike-thrush
Laughing Kookaburra	Grey Fantail
White-throated Treecreeper	Magpie-lark
Superb Fairy-wren	Little Raven
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Eastern Yellow Robin
White-eared Honeyeater	Silvereye
Bell Miner	Common Blackbird [I]
Red Wattlebird	Common Myna [I]
New Holland Honeyeater	Common Starling [I]
White-naped Honeyeater	Red-browed Finch
Spotted Pardalote	35 species

Southern Brown Bandicoot, Cranbourne - photo Judith Cooke

Dates for your Diary

13th-15th April 2012 - RFNC Autumn Camp - Beaufort
17th-19th August 2012 - SEANA Spring Camp - Bendigo Region
Hosted by Bendigo FNC

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